



Congressional Record

TL 3025

United States
of AmericaPROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 100th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 134

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1988

No. 8

Senate

SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR

● Mr. DURENBERGER. Mr. President, in August of last year, 39 of my colleagues joined me in sending a letter to Secretary of State Shultz regarding the continuing tragedy in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, which was invaded and occupied by Indonesia in 1975. By sending that letter, my colleagues and I wanted to ensure that East Timor receive international attention to help alleviate the suffering in that territory. I intend to pursue further efforts of this nature on the East Timor issue in 1988, not only because the suffering in East Timor persists, but also because silence can only help to breed further abuses in that little-known territory. I cannot, in good conscience, allow the plight of East Timor to continue without comment.

While the situation has improved since the traumatic days of the late 1970's and early 1980's, there should be no doubt that abuses in East Timor continue. A December 13, 1987 article in the Sunday Boston Globe makes that abundantly clear. So do persistent reports from a wide variety of religious and secular sources. The article in the Globe paints a grim picture of widespread fear among the Timorese population. It discusses abuses of detainees, and notes that the little the world hears about East Timor is merely a reflection of the tight restrictions placed on visitors, and the people whom they attempt to visit, by the Indonesian military.

The United States should do more about the East Timor situation. After I sent my letter last year, the State Department rapidly briefed my staff and claimed that there were no longer human rights problems in East Timor. This was strikingly similar to what I heard earlier in this decade when I first became involved in the tragedy of Timor. I do not dispute that the situation in Timor is better in 1988 than in 1981. But I also cannot dispute the numerous first-hand reports I have received about continuing violations in the area.

And if the U.S. Government should do more to address human rights violations in East Timor, so should others. Beginning this month, the U.N. Human Rights Commission will meet in Geneva to discuss the East Timor situation and other questions. I urge all members of the Human Rights Commission to approve the strongest possible resolution on the Timor situation. While there have been some improvements in Timor in recent years, this in no way outweighs the gravity of general conditions in the territory or the feelings of the inhabitants, who have thus far been denied any meaningful say in their own future. After as many as 150,000 to 200,000 East Timorese deaths as a result of the Indonesian assault, it is vital that the situation not be allowed to deteriorate any further. Current reports make it clear that serious human rights problems persist in East Timor. The U.N. Human Rights Commission will, I hope, act accordingly.

For the benefit of my colleagues, I ask that excerpts from the December 13, 1987 Boston Globe be published in the RECORD along with a New York Times article concerning the letter I sent with my Senate colleagues last year.

The material follows:

[From the Boston Globe, Dec. 13, 1987]

A "HIDDEN HOLOCAUST" IN THE PACIFIC

(By Richard H. Stewart)

It has been called the "hidden holocaust," so far removed from the world's consciousness that only a handful of people are aware of the tragic events that have ravaged the population of the little-known Pacific island of East Timor.

It has been estimated that as many as 200,000 people out of a population of nearly 700,000 have perished from violence, starvation and disease since the 1975 invasion by troops of Indonesian dictator General Suharto.

Based on a population comparison, this would be comparable to 36 million deaths in the United States.

International human-rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch as well as a coalition of inter-nation-

al church groups have provided reports of the brutality inflicted on the Timorese by Indonesian forces, including summary executions, beheadings, torture, imprisonment without trial and the use of civilians as human walls in front of Indonesian troops battling guerrilla forces.

Some civilians who have "disappeared" from their villages have been reported by several independent sources to have been dropped to their deaths from helicopters. There have been reports of a photograph in an Indonesian newspaper showing Indonesian soldiers holding up the heads of their Timorese victims.

Exact death tolls can only be estimated because the Indonesians have virtually shut off the island to access by outsiders. But sources with contacts in East Timor insist the reports of inhuman treatment by the Indonesians are not exaggerated.

THE STAGGERING STATISTICS

The International Committee of the Red Cross has been able to provide food and medical aid to limited parts of the island and is the only humanitarian organization allowed access to the island, even on a restricted basis.

Some evidence of the human suffering can be surmised from the report in 1985 of East Timor Gov. Mario Carrascalao, who said that 100,000 East Timorese had died since 1975 and the island had 20,000 orphans, 13,000 widows and 8,000 crippled or maimed.

The 12-year agony of the Timorese began Dec. 7, 1975, when Indonesian troops invaded the island under the guise of preventing a communist takeover. They claimed that the East Timorese had sought integration with Indonesia.

In the aftermath of the invasion, the United States protested its illegality by announcing an embargo on the sending of American weapons to Indonesia. The embargo was nothing more than a political smoke-screen. Professor Benedict Anderson of Cornell University, an Asia expert, discovered from a Pentagon report that the flow of arms to Indonesia had never been halted.

Prior to 1975, East Timor had been under Portuguese rule for 400 years, but the Portuguese government has all but abandoned the island in the wake of domestic political problems at home, leaving it vulnerable to Indonesian expansionist interests.

Ten days before the invasion, the East Timorese declared themselves independent from Portugal under the rule of a political party known as The Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor, which became better known as Fretilin.

To counter Indonesian forces, Fretilin leaders formed an armed guerrilla force, which has harassed the Indonesian military ever since.

Most recent estimates are that nearly two-thirds of the island, about the size of New Jersey, still has not been secured by Indonesian troops.

Last August, 40 U.S. senators protested conditions in East Timor and wrote to Secretary of State George Shultz that Indonesian forces were engaged in "a renewed offensive" against Timorese insurgents. Similar protests have been lodged by 144 members of Congress.

A former apostolic administrator (the Catholic diocese is being administered from the Vatican rather than from Indonesia) from 1977 to 1983, Msgr. Martino da Costa Lopes, outlined the conditions of the population in a private letter last year:

"In the interior, in many villages and concentration camps, the people lack the conditions of life to enable them to survive as a people . . . the people live in a state of permanent encirclement. They are not allowed to go more than three kilometers outside their villages. In addition, they always have to have a 'pass' issued by the Indonesian military authorities.

"It happens easily that East Timorese are accused of having contact with the guerrillas and then they become victims of torture, massacres, etc."

Msgr. Costa Lopes has testified that, when foreign visitors requested a meeting with him at his East Timor home, his home was first searched and Indonesian intelligence officers were often present during the discussions.

East Timor is predominantly Catholic. Indonesia is a Moslem nation.

CONDITIONS IN EAST TIMOR

Sources recently in contact with East Timor offer this picture of current conditions there:

A knock on the door is enough to make people afraid. Homes are raided and searched. People suspected of sympathizing with or supporting the guerrillas are arrested, often at night. People are afraid to be seen talking in groups.

It is illegal to listen to foreign broadcasts. People are arrested for having aerials. When foreign broadcasts do refer to East Timor, military vehicles tour the capital city of Dili with loudspeakers denouncing the broadcasts as lies.

Most jobs and places in schools go to Indonesians who have been moved into the island. Indonesian culture and language is being forced on the Timorese.

On the rare occasions when foreigners are allowed to visit, they are restricted in their movement. Indonesian soldiers are dressed in civilian clothes, and military vehicles are taken off the streets.

When foreign journalists visited the island during Indonesian elections in April, people were forced to take part in pro-Indonesian demonstrations. Even the prison population was released to swell the ranks of the demonstrators.

People who did not vote could not get identification cards, which are required for jobs and other means of survival.

Prisoners are held in secret prisons, which the Red Cross is not allowed to visit. Prisoners are beaten and tortured and some have been murdered.

Restrictions on movement make it difficult to grow crops, and severe malnutrition has resulted in some rural areas. Indonesia has taken control of the lucrative coffee crop.

Food shipped in from Indonesia is too expensive for many of the Timorese. There is a high mortality rate for children up to age 5.

Indonesia has instituted a highly-active birth-control program, particularly in the interior where guerrillas are most active,

using Deprovera, a vaccine banned in most Western countries. The birth-control program is financed by the World Bank. Some men and women have been sterilized without their knowledge during medical treatment.

Medicines are so scarce that hospitals have a shortage. Medicines are also so expensive that much of the indigenous population can't afford them. Birth control is free.

The current apostolic administrator, Msgr. Carlos Ximenes Belos, is under close military scrutiny. Military vehicles are frequently positioned outside his home.

Although the United Nations General Assembly condemned the Indonesian invasion soon after it occurred, 38 nations, including the United States, abstained. The resolution has been reaffirmed annually through 1982 but with dwindling support.

Indonesia's anticommunist government, its oil resources and strategic location between the Pacific and Indian oceans give it considerable international clout.

Portugal has neither the political will nor the military power to challenge the Indonesians, although there have been talks between the two nations.

A source in Lisbon said, "Indonesia feels it can keep protests at a lower level and avoid political embarrassment by agreeing to talks and making them drag on for as long as possible."

A bipartisan group of 40 senators has written to Secretary of State George P. Shultz about what they called "a renewed Indonesian military offensive against Timorese insurgents."

It was unusual for that many senators, led by Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, to express concern for a situation that draws little public attention.

Mr. Durenberger said in a statement that "by sending this letter, my colleagues and I want to insure that East Timor receives international attention that will help to alleviate the tragic suffering of the Timorese people."

Timor is an island at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago. During the colonial era, it was under Dutch rule in the west and Portuguese rule in the east. Indonesia inherited the Dutch portion when it gained independence and invaded East Timor in 1975.

Since then, according to repeated reports by Roman Catholic and humanitarian organizations, the Indonesians have sought, often with military force, to subdue East Timorese nationalist insurgents, many of whom are Catholics. Indonesia is largely Moslem. The statement by Mr. Durenberger said "international human-rights organizations and church bodies estimate that 150,000 East Timorese, one fifth of the island country's population, have perished from warfare and famine over the past 12 years."●